30 March 1972

Dear Harold:

This replies to yours of March 13, which was in response to mine of March 8 in which I apparently offered certain ideas incompletely or or in distorted form about Sino-Russian relationships and associated problems such as the Cold War.

I wish I could share your optimism that the Cold War is indeed over. In its most virulent form it is, of course; but my suppicions arise from the belief that it was merely an exaggerated form of certain endemic maladies from which we suffer as a people and as a nation, certainly at times as a mob. Our anti-Russian suspicion was inherited from the British and dates back to Jefferson's time. Partly again because of our British heritage, partly because of suppressed guilt feelings over our treatment of Indians and blacks, we are almost incorrigibly racist much of the time, unable to escape the narrow subjectivism and violent response pattern into which racism locks us. The Cold War, and the McCarthyism which was its finest flower, grew from rich soil. Talk about religious conflicts: we waged the Cold War with all the passion our Puritan forefathers lavished upon the Devil and Popish Plots. We may tone it down, even overcome to some extent and the intellectual straitjacket it has tied us up in for a generation, but its roots are alive, nourished by the same elements that helped it sprout and flourish in the first place.

I believe the Chinese understand this -- that they view us as potentially hostile not only to the Russians, who are both Communists and the second most powerful nation, but also to themselves because they are both Communists and potentially the most powerful nation of all because of their immense manpower and demonstrated capabilities. HOWEVER, and the capitals are necessary, the Chinese know we are a long way off, and they understand us well enough as individuals and human beings to believe that we are not fundamentally and temperamentally addicted to empire building. I think they believe firmly that the dymanics of capitalism impel us toward empire building, but that this is a passing phase which we should outgrow if given a little time. They have had some bad experiences with us, but not as bad as with other powers. They fought the Opium War with the British. They fought the French over Indochina. They fought the Japanese, first over Korea, then Manchuria, then all of China. They lost all these wars. The only time they've fought us was in Korea, and they consider they won that one. They know that there are times when we can be reasonable and pracitcal. With others, they are not sure. Especially are they not sure about Russia, although from long experience they understand Russia as well or better than anyone. In their minds, their bill of particulars against the Soviets is hotter than the one they had against the Czars. After all, the Czars were imperialists in an imperialistic world. The territory the Soviets still keep was taken by the Czars, but kept by the Soviets. You are correct that much of the griping about this is for internal political purposes, and I agree with your opinion that the Chinese do not particularly want this very cold region back and would go farther -- with a Russian population it would be a hell of a problem to them. But that does not keep the issue from being used as a bargaining point.

Also used are occasional disputes along the present border, but again I believe that most of these are symptoms of bargaining situations and and that in any case thus far have come about along rivers which demarcate the border. Both the Chinese and the Russians know that rivers meander and change course. Both know when this happens peasant populations are stranded in the other country. Both have settled many such disputes in the past and know exactly what is involved and what has to be done. The fact that a dispute like this breaks into the open means that it is being used to thwart or distract the other side in some current larger situation. This has been going on since the 16th century. Both sides are used to it. And as you say, China is usually pretty reasonable when it comes to really settling a border.

In that interesting tape you sent of the CBS forum among Cronkite, Sevareid, Bernard Kalb and some other guy, one of them quoted a foreign diplomat in Peking as saying that what has happened in China is 20 per cent Communist and 80 per cent Chinese. I think that ratio probably applies to their relations with the Russians too. That is, they part company with the Russians ideologically, as you point out, as to who really represents true Communism (particularly where the developing nations are concerned) but their basic reaction to the Russians is that of another power sharing the same land mass. When that power is still the same first group of western barbarians the Chinese ever encountered in force, they understandably have reservations. The Chinese always have dealt with barbarians; in fact much of the fun of being Chinese has consisted of having barbarians around to worry about politically, be amused by, to play off against each other, and even to feel sorry for. But western barbarians were somehow different. They actually used gunpowder in guns. They refused to learn Chinese in most cases. They not only challenged the Chinese national, and more important, cultural ego. Far worse, they ignored it. As the first of these fearsome characters, the Russians made an indelible impression, and Stalin was no help in overcoming it in spite of all the lip service the Chinese pay to him.

Of course Mao was wrong about Tito. He knew perfectly well he was wrong. But by denouncing Tito before Stalin dared to, (because it would unleash the heresy that the Communist nations were separate entities), Mao, who had invented Titoism, avoided being called a Tito and a dissident. Stalin knew perfectly well what Mao's game was, but could not afford to let it be known that he knew. Mao then went to Moscow, went through the necessary motions, and came home with the mutual defense treaty, a $300 million loan, and Stalin's commitment to get out of Manchuria. Not bad for a guy who was flat broke and had just taken over a country prostrate from 150 years of foreign invasion and domination and 25 years of civil war with Chiang Kai-shek. But to preserve the facade of Communist unity, Stalin had no choice and went through with the bargain. But it was just the beginning.

MacArthur is a tragic figure, not because he was fired, but because he was 25 years out of touch with China and was misled by his G2. He literally had no idea of what had been going on in China since the last time he was there in 1927. He knew enough, or remembered enough, of the Chinese to realize they would not be the same Communists as the Russians -- he told me so -- but he simply did not have any conception of what the Chinese had been going through and what it had done to them.

His inciting the Chinese along the Manchurian border came at the best possible time from the Chinese standpoint, not only for domestic purposes but also vis-a-vis Mao's relations with Stalin.

With Japan disposed of, China no longer had any highly visible external enemy, particularly since Russia was now not just a collection of barbarians but a nation of Communist brothers, supposedly. The reappearance of capitalist imperialist American forces along the Manchurian border, and in a friendly Communist North Korea at that, could hardly have been more propitious. The difficult job of getting the country under control with all the land reforms, taking over of private enterprise and other unpleasant things most Chinese were none too keen on, became suddenly much easier in the face of possible invasion from Korea. And by sending Chinese "volunteers" into Korea the Chinese created a situation which called for far more help from Stalin. As I've mentioned before, the Chinese came out of this deal with the most powerful army in Chinese history, thanks mostly to Russian arms which the Russians could hardly deny, partly due also to the enormous experience the Chinese picked up there, and the side benefit of getting rid of a lot of former Kuomintang troops who had surrendered and whom they didn't trust anyway.

If the Chinese hadn't had an American menace to scream about they'd have had to invent one, but they didn't need to. We did it all for them and probably insured the success of the revolution in China and certainly advanced it by at least a decade. And Russia paid. That's the beauty of it all from the Chinese standpoint.

After Stalin died in 1957, the Chinese mourned more convincingly than anyone. The Chinese are expert mourners. A death occurred in a Chinese family next door to us in Peking one time, and for days we enjoyed the alternate feasting and caterwauling -- everyone had a hell of a good time -- and the ladies dutifully took turns as chief mourners -- "You've cried long enough, Sister. Let me take over for a while."

Now that he no longer actually had Stalin to contend with, Mao could afford to defy him and thereby embarrass Khrushchev, He did. Moscow, which always had suffered all the ills of the Vatican syndrome, now became firmly locked into it, due in no small part to all the caterwauling about the great Stalin from Peking. The next year the Chinese launched the Great Leap Forward and began the commune program. All very un-Russian. All very contemptuous of the bourgeois ideals and materialistic yearnings of the Russians. China was going her own way, meanwhile making a frightful nuisance of herself by continuing to refer to that great exemplar of true communism, Joseph Stalin, who by this time had become a non-person in Russia. China subverted the Albanians (next door to Yugoslavia) and meddled in the Hungarian revolt, if not others. That did it. Khrushchev Khrushchev knew perfectly well what was happening, decided he'd had enough, and pulled 10,000 Russian technicians out of China in 1960. The Chinese resented like hell their taking their blueprints with them, but believe me, on balance were glad enough to see them go.

This is all pretty ridiculous, but we live in a ridiculous world, and the Chinese would be the first to say so. Like you, I think most of this is unnecessary and probably unwise and certainly unfortunate. The Chinese would agree but never admit it, of course. When they need the Russians, they know how to get them.

More elsewhere,

jdw